

BEFORE THE SOUTH CAROLINA STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

In the Matter of the Suspension)

of the Educator Certificate of)

Paula M. Cunningham)

Certificate 193094)

ORDER OF SUSPENSION

SUMMARY OF THE CASE

The South Carolina State Board of Education (State Board) considered this matter on December 14, 2005. On October 27, 2005, the Department of Education (Department) sent Paula M. Cunningham a notice of her right to a due process hearing regarding the possible suspension of her South Carolina educator certificate by regular and certified mail, return receipt requested, delivery restricted to addressee. Ms. Cunningham received the notice, as evidenced by the signed postal receipt bearing her signature. By letter of October 29, 2005, Ms. Cunningham informed the Department that she did not wish to request a hearing. After considering the information presented, the State Board voted to suspend Ms. Cunningham's certificate for two years.

FINDINGS OF FACT

Ms. Cunningham holds a valid certificate with over seven years experience. During the 2004-05 school year, Ms. Cunningham was employed by the Greenville County School District and was assigned as a special education teacher at Sue Cleveland Elementary School. On August 4, 2005, Ms. Cunningham resigned her position with the District following allegations that she had forged another teacher's name on two student Individualized Education Programs (IEPs). Ms. Cunningham admitted to her principal that she did sign the teacher's name to the two IEPs and that she had destroyed the documents after the forgery was detected.

CONCLUSIONS OF LAW

The State Board of Education may, for just cause, either revoke or suspend the certificate of any person. S.C. Code Ann. §59-25-150 (2004), S.C. Code Ann. §59-25-160 (2004); 24 S.C. Code Ann. Regs. 43-58. Just cause includes unprofessional conduct. S.C. Code Ann. § 59-25-160 (2004). The State Board finds that the information presented supports its determination that just cause exists to suspend Ms. Cunningham's certificate 193094 for a period of two years from December 14, 2005, through December 13, 2007. Should Ms. Cunningham wish to have her certificate reinstated at the end of the suspension period, she may make a written request for reinstatement to the Office of Educator Certification.

South Carolina State Board of Education

By: /S/ Paul Forrester

Paul M. Forrester, Chair

Columbia, South Carolina
December 14, 2005